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Maritime Sovereignty, the Territorialization of Islands and the Integration of Fishermen in Colonial Tunisia (La Galite (لطة ḡālat)¹)

Abstract:

To whom do small islands belong? What role do they play in the processes of colonization and maritime territorialization? In what way does the exploitation of their resources contribute to making them central to power and sovereignty conflicts? This article considers the colonisation of the Maghreb from the perspective of island spaces as “land-sea regimes”. It focuses on an archipelago located off the coast of Tabarka, on the maritime border of Algeria and Tunisia. Frequented for centuries by fishermen exploiting the coral in the region, the Galite became a geostrategic place in the 19th century for coastal security, maritime trade and fishing. The study of the fishermen's families who settled there from the 1870s onwards, their networks and their relations with the authorities, invites us to reconsider the history of the colonization of North Africa from the sea and the islands.

Keywords:

Island, Colonial Studies, Tunisia, Fishermen, Maritime Sovereignty

¹ Article translated from French by Caroline Ann Stephens, with financial support from the Institut Convergences Migrations (CNRS). Special thanks to Guillaume Calafat, Fabrice Jesné and Isaac Land for proofreading the article.

If you look closely at the map of the Algerian coastline established by the hydrographic surveys carried out between 1831 and 1833 by the Frenchmen Auguste Bérard and Urbain Dortet de Tessan, you might be surprised to see the island of Tabarka and the Galite archipelago at its eastern end.² Although France did not exercise sovereignty over these two areas of the Tunisian Beylical territory, it had jurisdiction over the waters that bordered them. The Treaty of 26 October 1832, signed with the Bey of Tunis during the first years of the conquest of Algeria, gave France control over the rich Tunisian coral reefs, granting it, in exchange for an annual fee, full customs and police rights. This can be seen as a feature of the “informal imperialism” that characterised French expansion in the nineteenth century.³ This Tunisian extension of French maritime sovereignty draws attention to the extent to which the Maghreb waters, before the land,⁴ bore the first impact of European influence⁵, forming an extension of the long earlier history of concessions concerning the exploitation of coral acquired in this region from the end of the Middle Ages by Catalan, Genoese and Provençal companies.⁶

Indeed, a situation in which jurisdiction over waters—derived solely from possessing a natural resource—took precedence over land sovereignty was uncommon.⁷ Modern Mediterranean history has taught us that the states claimed the right to enforce the law and determine the limits of their maritime domains based on the contours of the coastline itself.⁸ Unlike Tabarka, the Galite Islands were never claimed by any state before the first fishermen settled there in the 1870s. The only exception worth mentioning was the concession granted in the fourteenth century by Pope Clement VI to the Infante Louis of Spain, Admiral of France, of a group of islands, which included the Canary Islands and the Galite Islands, as compensation for the loss of the Castile throne.⁹ Nevertheless, this did not prevent the islands from being coveted throughout the following centuries, and increasingly so in the nineteenth century. Historiography has not brought to the forefront situations in which colonization followed this reversed process, via the sea and its exploitation, yet this is the pattern that Galite Islands followed; their administration only began in real terms at the beginning of the twentieth century.

French research in colonial history has largely neglected the maritime aspect of colonization. The focus has been on the appropriation of land and its natural resources. In contrast, Anglophone research on colonial empires introduces maritime themes in a global

² Auguste Bérard, *Description nautique des côtes de l'Algérie* (Paris, 1837). The map is available here: <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb449329454>.

³ David Todd, *A Velvet Empire. French Informal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton 2021), 45.

⁴ Maritime spaces are not considered in the studies on colonial sovereignty in Tunisia as the work of Mary D. Lewis, *Divided Rule. Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia* (Berkeley 2014).

⁵ Hugo Vermeren, ‘Négocié le droit de pêche. L’Italie, la loi de 1888 et la colonisation maritime du Maghreb au XVIII^e siècle (Algérie, Tunisie)’, *Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome*, 133-1 (2021), 21.

⁶ See in particular Philippe Gourdin, *Tabarka. Histoire et archéologie d’un préside espagnol et d’un comptoir génois en terre africaine (XVI^e-XVIII^e siècle)* (Rome, 2008).

⁷ Even though in all the world's oceans, maritime spaces, in particular high seas, have been areas of conflict over sovereignty since the 16th century: C. S. Maier, *Once within Borders. Territory of Power, Wealth and Belonging since 1500* (Cambridge 2016), 39.

⁸ Guillaume Calafat, *Une mer jalouse. Contribution à l’histoire de la souveraineté (Méditerranée, XVII^e siècle)* (Paris, 2019), 282.

⁹ Armand d’Avezac, *L’Univers. Histoire et description de tous les peuples. Îles d’Afrique* (Paris, 1848).

vision.¹⁰ This article attempts to explain the occupation and the exploitation of small islands to contribute to the new oceanic history of the world and of colonial empires.¹¹ It is helpful to envision small islands as territories of “land-sea” regimes, to focus the processes that crossed the land-sea divide and inquire about their regulatory effects.¹² The conflicts that occurred from the governance of island territories and the fishing territories that surround it offer an empirical demonstration of this approach, precisely for the way it challenges mainstream understandings of colonial and national territoriality in the Mediterranean. These geographic spaces must be regarded in their “terraqueous” dimension, to use the concept elaborated by Alison Bashford.¹³ Small islands are by nature spaces surrounded by sea where the separation between land and sea is porous. Fishermen cross this land-sea interface daily. They live and practice on both sides of the coastline, constantly challenging the permeability of these “liminal” spaces.¹⁴

Considered here as a new measuring instrument for the colonization processes that were taking place in the Maghreb, the Galite Islands offered, as we shall see, a precious field of investigation to “survey the arenas of contact” and study from a more restricted angle, the layering of sovereignty conflicts and territorial rivalries for the appropriation of the islands and their maritime resources on the southern Mediterranean.¹⁵ Throughout a long nineteenth century, we can observe on this small territory whose surface was hardly larger than 8 km², a plurality of actors who all coveted *de facto* or legal property: the fishermen who fished for mendoles, coral and lobster and who had been going there for generations asserted their right to use the waters around it; Italy, which, through its consular representatives, invoked the various fishing communities’ Italian origins; the Bey of Tunis, who claimed territorial sovereignty that was difficult to contest with respect to international law; and finally, France, which wanted a strategic location to control shipping and fishing along the Maghreb coast. The focus on the territorial claims and the sluggish implementation of the Galite Islands’ administration, highlights the “nested sovereignties” and “embedded territorialities”¹⁶ as much in the continuities as in the discontinuities of colonial times, thus nuancing the more typical linear reading of French colonial rule in the Maghreb.¹⁷

The dissemination and multilingualism of available sources that narrate the history of the Galite Islands and its human inhabitation testify both to the fragmentation of colonial

¹⁰ Sea for example, D. Wilson, ‘European colonization, law and Indigenous marine dispossession : historical perspectives on the construction and entrenchment of unequal marine governance’, *Maritime Studies*, 20 (2021-1).

¹¹ David Armitage, Alison Bashford and Sujit Sivasundaram (eds.), *Oceanic History* (New York 2017).

¹² On the “land-sea regimes”: Lauren Benton and N. Perl-Rosenthal (ed.), *A World at Sea. Maritime Practices and Global History* (Philadelphia 2020), 522.

¹³ A. Bashford, ‘Terraqueous Histories’, *Historical Journal*, 60 (2017-2).

¹⁴ R. Grancher, M.-W. Serruys, ‘Changes on the Coast. Towards a Terraqueous Environmental History’, *Journal for the History of Environment and Society*, 6 (2021).

¹⁵ Based on this approach : Romain Bertrand (ed.), *L’exploration du monde. Une autre histoire des grandes découvertes* (Paris 2019), 18-19 ; R. Bertrand and G. Calafat, ‘La micro-histoire globale : affaire(s) à suivre’, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 73 (2018-1).

¹⁶ N. Barreyre and G. Verdo, ‘Souveraineté et territoire : enjeux et perspectives’, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 69 (2014-2).

¹⁷ C. Lefebvre and M. Oualdi, ‘Remettre le colonial à sa place. Histoire enchevêtrées des débuts de la colonisation en Afrique de l’Ouest et au Maghreb’, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 72 (2017-3); R. Branche, “‘Au temps de la France’. Identités collectives et situation coloniale en Algérie”, *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*, 117 (2013-1).

Tunisia's archives and to the extent of the fishing practices and merchant networks that included the fishermen who had settled there. The archives of the protectorate administration are divided between Tunis and Nantes. The regulatory texts on maritime fishing and fishing boats were found in both French and Arabic. As the exploitation of Tunisian maritime resources became part of international debates on maritime law and the demarcation of territorial waters, the diplomatic archives of Paris and Rome help us to evaluate the range of political, economic and territorial issues that the settlement of fishermen on the island and their fishing activities represented for the imperial projections of France and Italy.

Fig1: "Plan géométrique de l'île de la Galita, levé par le capitaine Lazare Giove d' Ajaccio" (redessiné par Barthélémy Benoist, ca 1815), <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53237601t/f1.item.r=%22la%20galite%22#>

Halieutic patterns

The rich historiography on migration has largely marginalized fishermen's migrations—perceived as a behaviour akin to transhumance, a temporary circuit of movement governed by tradition and expediency—whereas in contrast, the great rural emigration involving Europe and the Americas seemed like a novel and substantial phenomenon. Migration has not been integrated into the history of Mediterranean fisheries; it is more often portrayed as an offshoot of localized activities, so that the circulation of seafarers, as well as the related knowledge, practices, and regulations involved in migratory fishing are minimized.¹⁸ Yet for centuries, the fishing worlds have produced extremely diverse migratory patterns. From the distant expeditions of the modern shipping enterprises of Atlantic Europe fishing for sperm whales and cod, to the plethora of coastal fishermen who have populated the islands and shores of the contemporary Mediterranean, this important part of the marine universe offers a vast and understudied sample of exchange networks, encounters and interactions likely to nourish the recent work of global history.¹⁹

If we look at the western Mediterranean basin, idiosyncratic patterns occurred within the areas of halieutic circulation. They did not follow the regular networks of maritime routes mapped out by commercial exchanges and passenger transport, which have been studied extensively in the modern era.²⁰ Rather, they acted following a specific organization that had been developed over time and included less important territories, such as smaller islands or isolated beaches, most often overshadowed by the city-ports towards which travel and flows converged at the time of world maritimization.²¹ Like other maritime activities, such as coastal shipping, fishing impacted the configuration and economy of the

¹⁸ See the collective works of reference, all of them resulting from international conferences held in Italy: Giuseppe Doneddu and Maurizio Gangemi (eds.), *La pesca nel Mediterraneo occidentale (Secoli XVI-XVIII)* (Bari, 2000); Giuseppe Doneddu and Alessandro Fiori (eds.), *La pesca in Italia tra età moderna e contemporanea. Produzione, mercato, consumo* (Sassari, 2003); Valdo D'Arienzo and Biagio Di Salvia (eds.), *Pesci, barche, pescatori nell'area mediterranea dal medioevo all'età contemporanea* (Milan, 2010).

¹⁹ C. Douki and P. Minard, 'Histoire globale, histoires connectées : un changement d'échelle historiographique ?', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 54 (2007-5); Bertrand and Calafat, 'La micro-histoire globale', art. cit.

²⁰ Xavier Daumalin, Daniel Faget and Olivier Raveux, *La mer en partage. Sociétés littorales et économies maritimes, XVI^e-XX^e siècle* (Aix-en-Provence, 2016), 13.

²¹ *La maritimisation du monde de la Préhistoire à nos jours : enjeux, objets, méthodes* (Paris, 2016).

ports' perimeters.²² Far from limiting themselves to the linear chain migration model that characterized other types of professional mobility, the fishermen's migrations, whether for food or speculation, followed complex itinerant circuits, raise questions about the geographical construction of the territories of mobility and, ultimately, the fragmented structure of maritime space-time, as revealed by the *new thalassology studies* movement.²³ Each location, each refuelling point, each discharge port, each hospitable bay in case of a storm, each beach where nets and machinery could be repaired, constituted a stage or drop-off point. Over the long term, the fishing boats' circuits contributed to linking the islands to the coasts, the small islands to the large ones, and the sea to the continent.

The Italian geographer Assunto Mori was the first to grasp the function of island connectivity through the migrations of fishermen. Several of his works show the extent to which fishermen's movements from the islands of the Gulf of Naples and Gaeta contributed to establishing settlements in the coastal stations on the Tyrrhenian Sea.²⁴ These fishing circuits, which expanded as the banks subsided and new fishing grounds were accessed, led Italian fishermen to settle on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, and eventually on the Tunisian island of "La Galite" during the nineteenth century. This small territory has been a shelter for sailors and fishermen sailing between the two shores of the western Mediterranean since ancient times and makes up the archipelago of the same name, which includes the islets of Galiton, Fouchelle and Chiens. Located a little less than 50 km north of Tabarka (طبرقة), the island, the northernmost point of Africa, has two peaks, one of which is nearly 500 meters high and visible from Bône (بنةعنا *Annaba*) in good weather.²⁵ In the nineteenth century, as the number of Sardinian, Tuscan and especially Neapolitan coral ships involved in fishing increased, this barren rock became a popular shelter. More than a hundred Italian boats reaped bounteous catches during the long summer seasons until the mid-1860s.²⁶ After registering with the consular authority in Bône, La Calle (القالة *El kala*) or Tunis, the crews used the island as a depot on which to store supplies and shelter from bad weather. In early autumn, they joined their home ports, contributing, through their pendular migrations, to transform the Galician archipelago into an "extended archipelago".²⁷

As a place of passage and encounters on the high seas, the Galite Islands were not "inhuman", to use Braudelian terminology, even though they were not permanently

²² G. Buti, 'Colporteurs des mers et caravaniers en Méditerranée occidentale. L'exemple des relations entre la France méridionale et l'Italie du sud au XVIII^e siècle', in Biagio Salvemini (ed.), *Lo spazio tirrenico nella 'grande trasformazione' . Merci, uomini e istituzioni nel Settecento e nel primo Ottocento* (Bari, 2009).

²³ In contrast to Fernand Braudel's unitary conception of the Mediterranean space: P. Horden and N. Purcell, 'The Mediterranean and the 'New Thalassology'', *American Historical Review*, 111 (2006-3), 722-740 ; M. Petruszewicz, 'Il Mediterraneo dopo Braudel : è possibile una nuova storiografia ?', in Fortunato Cacciatore and Alessia Niger (eds.), *Il Mediterraneo: incontro di culture* (Rome, 2007); David Abulafia, *The Great Sea : a human history of the Mediterranean* (Londres, 2011).

²⁴ A. Mori, 'Sul popolamento recente di alcuni comuni costieri del Lazio', in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale per gli studi sulla popolazione, Roma 7-10 settembre 1931* (Rome, 1933) ; 'Le migrazioni stagionali dei pescatori nell'Alto Tirreno in relazione col popolamento recente dei centri costieri ', *Bollettino della R. Società Geografica Italiana*, i (1948).

²⁵ C.-A. Rozet and E. Cartette, 'Algérie', in *L'Univers* (Paris, 1850), 9.

²⁶ 134 on average during the period 1845-1866. Detailed figures are given in the *Annuaire Statistique de l'Algérie*.

²⁷ In the Mediterranean area described by Horden and Purcell, the islands cover a much larger maritime territory of interconnections than just their land perimeter: *The corrupting sea. A study of mediterranean history* (Oxford, 2000), 133 ff.

populated until the mid-1870s.²⁸ By cross-referencing sources, it was possible to identify the precise moment that the first fishing families began settling permanently. Several sources converge for the beginning of the 1870s, including two accounts of the scientific 1877 expedition led by Enrico D'Albertis, the former captain of the Italian Navy, and the naturalist Arturo Issel.²⁹ The first to settle on the island was Antonio Darco, who set himself up as a coral fisherman. Born in 1827 on the island of Ponza, he settled in La Calle in 1867 and was subsequently followed by several of his siblings, his wife and children.³⁰ The family stayed on the Galite Islands for the first time in 1872 and then again in 1873, before settling there permanently between the summer of 1875 and 1876. They were followed by several other families from Ponza, some of whom came directly from this island, while others, like the Darco family, came from Bône or La Calle.

Fig2: Birthplaces of the inhabitants of the Galite Island, Cadastral censuses 1898 and 1933 (map Hugo Vermeren, Qgis), NAT, FPC-M3-E-23-1362

The first Galicians' migratory routes that we were able to reconstruct followed the trajectory of many Italians who reached Algeria during the first four decades of the French military occupation that began in 1830. Like Ventotene and the other islands in the Tyrrhenian Basin, Ponza provided a large workforce to the boat owners of Torre del Greco, who equipped the majority of the Mediterranean coral ships.³¹ Settling as closely as possible to the resource and wishing to free themselves from the Livornese and Neapolitan merchants who provided the capital necessary to finance the costly trips to Africa, some of the shipowners took up residence in Bône, but more frequently in La Calle. This transfer was a way for them to escape from the control and economic pressure exerted by the traders. Hence, the profound changes in the Algerian fishing sector from 1870 to 1880, due to the depletion of the coral reefs and the progressive closure of fishing to foreigners, pushed the coral fishermen to the other side of the border towards eastern Tunisia. The settlements on the Galite Islands, established by the families who had passed through Bône and La Calle, were the result of the decline in coral fishing in the region.

As always in the fisheries sector, there was a close link between the type of resource exploited and the nature of mobility.³² For the other families who came directly from Ponza, settling on the Galite Islands was more about the proximity to the precious resource found on the seafloor surrounding the island, the lobster. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the links that united these families: their origins and their belonging to the coralline circuit networks.³³ The organization of this type of fishing was special, reminding one of the capitalistic workings of the coral trade, another sedentary species with a high resale price

²⁸ P. Soumille, 'Minorités et vie maritime : pêcheurs italiens et français à la Galite (Tunisie) des années 1870 aux années 1940', in *Minorités techniques et métiers* (Aix-en-Provence, 1980); 'Galite', in Gabriel Camps (ed.), *Encyclopédie Berbère. XIX* (Aix-en-Provence, 1998).

²⁹ Enrico D'Albertis, *Crociera del Violante comandato dal Capitano-armatore D'Albertis durante l'anno 1876* (Gênes, 1877); Arturo Issel, *Crociera del Violante : comandato dal capitano armatore Enrico d'Albertis durante l'anno 1877* (Gênes, 1878).

³⁰ Silvio Corvisieri, *All'isola di Ponza. Regno borbonico e Italia nella storia di un'isola (1734-1984)* (Rome, 1985), 195 ff.

³¹ Maria Sirago, *Gente di mare : storia della pesca sulle coste campane* (Naples, 2014), 146.

³² See for example M-C. Cormier-Salem : 'Les pêcheurs, nomades de la mer ? L'exemple des déplacements en Casamance', *L'espace géographique*, 24 (1995-1).

³³ Regarding the coralline networks in this region: H. Vermeren, *Les Italiens à Bône (1865-1940). Migrations méditerranéennes et colonisation de peuplement en Algérie* (Rome, 2017), Ch. 1.

and global trade networks.³⁴ For the Ponzesi fishermen, it implied soliciting the help of the dealers working in the Cagliari port, which was the central point of Italian lobster fishing,³⁵ and which was where their small boats, unable to sail to the Tunisian coast, were loaded onto the large cargo vessels. The live-haul vessels sailed to the fishing areas, packed the living product and then exported it from Sardinia to Europe. By settling on the Galite Islands, the fishermen were no longer dependent on Sardinian investment and were able to reduce the costs and fatigue that resulted from their annual trips. Moreover, by studying each island separately, it is possible to apply Jules Michelet's naturalist observation to their migratory cycle concerning the crustaceans' behaviour and movements that "discouraged by the movement and fights of the sea, let themselves succumb to the land, less warlike and less agitated".³⁶

Finally, the evolution of these halieutic patterns between Italy and the Maghreb constitutes a sort of pre-territorialization of the island's maritime contours and the first stage of the land-sea regime that characterises the island spaces of the colonial Maghreb. This process is also reflected in the taking of possession of the islands themselves.

Taking possession

Aliette Geistdoerfer's research in maritime ethnology teaches us that the fishermen's mobility created a type of territorial occupation akin to appropriation.³⁷ It was an annual custom, and whether they remained there for long or short periods, they still gained "intimate knowledge" of the shores on which they stayed, to the point of taking possession of them.³⁸ This is found in a passage written by Alexandre Dumas, who arrived on the Galite Islands during his sailing exploration of the Maghreb in 1846:

A small boat was seen sheltering among the rocks that punctuated the approach to the land. It belonged to some coral fishermen. We exchanged a few words with them [...] as astonished as they were to see their uninhabited island visited by [...] such lovely and extensive company.³⁹

"Their uninhabited island". This makes sense here, for the fishermen were, in essence, nomadic; nevertheless, they were attached to the shores they spent time on, to the point of feeling at home. And subsequently, this is how their migration practices and relationships to the territory were developed.⁴⁰

More specifically, though, to whom did the Galite Islands belong? This was, in short, what preoccupied the French Directorate of Consulates and Commercial Affairs in March

³⁴ F. Trivellato, 'From Livorno to Goa and Back: Merchant Networks and the Coral-Diamond Trade in the Early-Eighteenth Century', *Portuguese Studies*, 16 (2000).

³⁵ G. Doneddu, 'Pesci, barche e pescatori nella Sardegna della prima metà del Novecento', in D'Arienzo and Di Salvia (eds.), *Pesci, barche, pescatori*.

³⁶ Jules Michelet, *La mer* (Paris, 1983 (1861)), 188.

³⁷ A. Geistdoerfer, 'Connaissance et appropriation des territoires de pêche', *Bulletin d'écologie humaine*, 3 (1984).

³⁸ R. Tirel, 'De l'Italien au marsouin : migrations transfrontalières, espaces et identités (1870-1930)', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 58 (1999-1), 44.

³⁹ Alexandre Dumas, *Impressions de voyage sur Le Véloce ou Tanger, Alger, Tunis* (Paris, 1855), 392.

⁴⁰ Based on this approach: Michael J. Casimir and Aparna Rao (eds), *Mobility and territoriality: social and spatial boundaries among foragers, fishers, pastoralists* (Providence, 1992).

1878.⁴¹ The question of state ownership of the Galite Islands dated back to the early years of the French conquest of Algeria. As early as 1832, the Ministry of War considered annexing the island to Bône, which would have allowed for more effective surveillance of coral fishing and smuggling routes. However, when the Algerian maritime districts were demarcated in 1856, the island was excluded from Algerian maritime territory. Later, in the mid-1870s, France sought to restore some of the lighthouses on the Algerian-Tunisian border and get them working efficiently, subsequently facilitating navigation and strengthening its surveillance power over the Malta Channel.⁴² The French consul in Tunis sent an emissary to inspect the island, where he found a family of Italian fishermen living in a cave, two officers and five Tunisian soldiers. The Political Department of Foreign Affairs thus recognized: “The Tunisian government has really taken possession of the Galite Islands and maintains sovereignty there daily. Therefore, the establishment of a French lighthouse must be preceded by diplomatic negotiations with the Regency”.⁴³ A year later, France began negotiations with Le Bardo and recognized the Bey’s sovereignty of the island.⁴⁴

The establishment of a Tunisian garrison was a direct result of the Italian fishermen’s settlement. Immediately or almost immediately upon arrival, they set up their nets to capture the lobsters and cleared some land, thus marking the beginning of territorial appropriation, which did not leave Mohamed Es-Saddock and his First Minister Kheireddine Pacha indifferent, as the “Italian offensive” continued toward Djédeida.⁴⁵ In November 1873, the Bey issued an expulsion order against the new occupants and sent a warship to notify them. It was rumoured that the expulsion had been put forward by “a foreign consul”,⁴⁶ leading one to believe that it was an English or, more likely, a French manoeuvre. Indeed, the Galite Islands’ occupation by Italian fishermen concerned the French government, but not as much as the Algerian maritime authorities. In a note dated September 5, 1873, the Commander of the Navy in Algiers reported:

It seems that the Italians wish to occupy the Galite Islands [...] it is the beginning of effective occupation that will later establish acquired rights when other Italians join their compatriots, thus giving some importance to the settlement.⁴⁷

In this context, the fishermen were seen as pioneering artisans; as settlers opening the way to Italian occupation in the Ottoman province. However, as they were forced to leave their new home, driven out by Tunisian soldiers to La Goulette, they immediately sought help from their consul in Tunis, who managed to negotiate their departure in exchange for an

⁴¹ The La Courneuve Center for Diplomatic Archives (CCDA), Memoirs and Documents, Tunis, 49MD/9, establishment of a lighthouse on one of the Galician islands (1878).

⁴² *Ibid.*, note on the islands of Tabarque and Galite (1874).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, establishment of a lighthouse on one of the Galician islands (1878).

⁴⁴ A file of plans and photographs of the Tunisian Lighthouses and Beacons Service is kept at the French National Archives issued under the code F/14/20297. See also J-C Fichou, ‘La signalisation maritime en Tunisie (1881-1920) ou les phares de la présence coloniale’, *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 128 (2010).

⁴⁵ ‘L’affaire de la Djédeida’, a vast estate located west of Tunis and operated by an Italian trading company contributed to rising tensions between the Tunisian and Italian governments: Jean Ganiage, *Les origines du protectorat français en Tunisie (1861-1881)* (Paris, 1959), 403.

⁴⁶ Issel, *Crociera del Violante*, 19-20.

⁴⁷ CCDA, Memoirs and Documents, Tunis, 49MD/9, report by Rear Admiral Mouchez, Commander of the Navy in Algeria, 5 September 1873.

indemnity of 2,000 piasters, compensation for the work they had undertaken in clearing the land and planting crops.⁴⁸

Thus, the Bey was compelled to pay for the expropriation of foreign fishermen who had no rights to property on the island. However, by defending the economic interests of his constituents, the Italian Consul General in Tunis found himself at the centre of a territorial conflict, indeed, a diplomatic one if one places this fact within the broader context of the Italian-Tunisian dispute. His action indirectly legitimized the fishermen's illegal occupation of the island. Some time later, they came back to the island, joined by other families,⁴⁹ thus prompting the Bey to decree, in November 1877, that: "Whatever the origin of an individual, they are forbidden to enter the aforementioned island, to settle there under any pretext and to take any products from there, no matter how small they may be".⁵⁰ Consequently, a military post was established to prevent the settlement on, and exploitation of, the island.⁵¹ This first official act of taking possession of the Galite Islands, besides manifesting the Tunisian government's resolution not to yield any territory to the subjects of a foreign power, also demonstrated the seafarers' influence on the occupation process of the Tunisian coastlines and islands in pre-colonial Tunisia.⁵²

The fishermen's refusal to leave the island invites us to reflect on the relationship that the fishing communities tend to have with both power and the territory. From their point of view, the legitimacy of their presence on the Galite Islands, where they had been going to fish for many generations, and which, up until then, had been free from any state intervention, could not be called into question by exercising sovereignty, whatever form it took. Thus, the twenty or so rebels who lived in two caves took advantage of the changeover of the soldiers' shifts and set up in the guardhouse, installing their furniture imported from La Calle. They declared themselves "masters of the country" and harassed, insulted and threatened the Tunisian guards, who resigned themselves to this takeover.⁵³ But with the beginning of French colonisation and the importation of new legal tools for state territorialisation, the balance of power shifted.

Resistance to leasing

Traditionally, historians of colonization and empires were more interested in the repercussions of military conquests on the occupation and control of the shores, and less in the impact of colonial changes on maritime spaces, their resources and the populations

⁴⁸ The National Archives of Tunisia (NAT), FPC-E-0587-3, note in response to General Logerot's communication, 23 February 1884.

⁴⁹ Vicari Sant'Agabio, Consul General of Italy in Algiers, to Luigi Melegari, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Algiers, 21 November 1877 : ministero degli Affari esteri, *I documenti diplomatici italiani, seconda serie : 1870-1896* (Rome, 1985), ix, 213,

⁵⁰ NAT, FPC-E-0587-3, decree of Mohamed Es-Saddock of 10 Kaada 1294 (16 November 1877).

⁵¹ The garrison would have had up to six men: The Nantes Center of Diplomatic Archives (NCDA), 1TUV/126/50, Eugène de Fages, Director General of Public Works, Stephen Pichon, Resident General, 21 October 1902.

⁵² J. Clancy-Smith, 'Making a living in pre-colonial Tunisia: the sea, contraband and other illicit activities, c. 1830-1881', *European Review of History*, 19 (2012).

⁵³ NAT, FPC-E-0587-3, report by Sar Koularassi Ahmed El Fahla, commander of the Galite post, to the Tunisian Minister of War, 6 November 1883.

that exploited them.⁵⁴ Yet due to the extent of its coastlines and the diversity of its fishing communities, colonial Tunisia offers a wide range of case studies covering the sea, the processes of dispossession and the appropriation of shared environmental assets. In recent years, exactly these kinds of processes have attracted considerable attention from historians.⁵⁵ Colonial Tunisia featured a wide variety of these sorts of projects, ranging from the public and private development of ports, harbours, beaches, lagoons and other surrounding areas. By supporting the so-called “official” colonization, which consisted in creating villages populated by Provençal and Breton fishermen,⁵⁶ France multiplied the legal concessions made to private entrepreneurs. Based on the seigneurial model inherited from the Ancien Régime, these took many forms, including the occupation of a portion of the coastline, exclusive rights to fishery resources, and enclosures.⁵⁷ The considerable number of concession files contained in the Tunisian government archives reveals how this taking possession of the shoreline collided with pre-colonial customary practices. The latter were defended either by indigenous coastal communities, whose status of owners more often than not passed to that of farmers, or, as in this case, by groups of non-indigenous fishermen who had regularly resided in these areas for several generations.⁵⁸

Weakened and in debt since the 1864 insurrection and placed under trusteeship by the International Financial Commission in 1867, Le Bardo began to accord both land and bordigues in return for foreign capital well before the protectorate was established in 1881. However, it was during the first years of the protectorate, under the impetus of Paul Cambon, who occupied the General Residence from February 1882 to October 1886, that there was a real increase in attempts of private colonization.⁵⁹ On August 23, 1883, the Bey of Tunis, backed by the Financial Commission, gave 168 hectares of land in the eastern part of the Galite Islands to a man named Jean-Claude Barban, whose aim was to raise cattle.⁶⁰ After the value of the land was assessed by a commission of *amins*, it was leased to him under an *enzel* (*inzāl*) contract in return for an annual fee of 700 piasters.⁶¹ This form of perpetual concession enabled the purchasers to farm the land without prior investment, and eventually become owners.⁶² During the negotiations, the Executive Committee of the Financial Commission disclosed that several fishing families were living on the island but disclaimed all responsibility for evicting them.⁶³ Besides the guarantee of

⁵⁴ See the approach suggested by Felipe Fernandez-Armeto, *The Sea and Civilization. A Maritime History of the World* (London, 2013).

⁵⁵ See in particular Frédéric Graber and Fabien Locher’s introduction to (ed.), *Posséder la nature. Environnement et propriété dans l’histoire* (Paris, 2018).

⁵⁶ J-C. Fichou, ‘L’Algérie et la Tunisie, terres promises des pêcheurs sardiniens bretons ? (1880-1905)’, *Revue d’histoire Outre-Mer*, 350-351 (2006).

⁵⁷ R. Grancher, ‘À qui appartiennent les poissons? Réflexions sur la généalogie du droit de pêcher en mer dans la France d’Ancien Régime’, in Christophe Cérino, Bernard Michon and Éric Saunier (eds.), *La pêche : regards croisés*, (Le Havre, 2017).

⁵⁸ D. Faget, ‘La mer disputée : conflits de pêche et rivalités territoriales dans le golfe de Gabès (1830-1914)’, in *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ M. Elloumi, ‘Les terres domaniales en Tunisie ; Histoire d’une appropriation par les pouvoirs publics’, *Études rurales*, 192 (2013), 48.

⁶⁰ NAT, FPC-E-0587-3, the president of the Financial Commission to the Bey, 25 August 1883.

⁶¹ An *enzel* is a ‘type of lease particular to Tunisia [...] which made it possible to implement the principle of the inalienability of pious foundations’: *Encyclopédie de l’islam, nouvelle édition* (Leiden-Paris, 1982), 423.

⁶² Regarding the ‘enzel’ regime and its legal circumventions of land grabbing during the protectorate, see Ali Mahjoubi, *L’établissement du protectorat français en Tunisie* (Tunis, 1977), 301 ff.

⁶³ NAT, FPC-E-0587-3, Paul Cambon, Resident general to General Logerot, commander of the occupation division, 23 February 1884.

annual rent, the concession of the Galite Islands enabled the Tunisian government to save on the maintenance of a garrison. This was at least the argument put forward by the Financial Commission, under the orders of the General Residence since Mohammed Es-Sadok's death in October 1882. While Barban requested that the entire island be ceded, the President of the Commission explained to the Tunisian prime minister that:

By installing a farmer [...] the government would provide itself with a worker who was as interested as the government in preventing any encroachment or occupation likely to harm their rights of ownership and sovereignty.⁶⁴

The full leasing of the Galite Islands to the French concessionaire including *de facto* the repeal of the Decree of November 1877, the discontinuation of the Tunisian garrison, and the succession of General Boulanger, then commander of the occupation division, “were necessary to affirm that the island was part of the Regency”.⁶⁵ In his naïveté, Barban had hoped to negotiate the departure of the fishermen exclusively. After having stayed on the island in 1883, 1885 and 1887 and attempting to assert his right over the five families present on the island by imposing a tax on the crops and livestock they owned, he resolved to ask the Civil Control of Bizerte to arbitrate.⁶⁶ However, we do not know whether the dispute between Barban and the fishermen was ever ruled on, as the former died at the beginning of the 1890s.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, his actions provoked a discussion on the possible attachment of the island to the administrative and judicial district of Bizerte.⁶⁸

How could Tunisian courts rule against foreigners concerning a territory that had no defined status within the protectorate's administration? In April 1888, after a quadrilateral exchange between the Resident-General, the Civil Controller of Bizerte, the Commander of the Military Circle of Bizerte and the Public Prosecutor in Tunis, it was finally decided to attach the Galite Islands to the administrative and judicial district of Bizerte, rather than to the neighbouring district of Aïn Drahem on which Tabarka depended. The Galite Islands' geographical situation gave them a singular geostrategic dimension as an outpost for Bizerte's naval base.⁶⁹ This project was implemented in March 1886 under the third Freycinet government as part of the policy to develop control points.⁷⁰ Following the recommendation of Bizerte's Civil Controller, one of the fishermen, Jean Cross, a former French naturalized coral boat owner, was appointed to the job of coast guard, thus

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, the president of the Financial Commission to Mohammed Aziz Bouattour, first minister of the Bey, 26 March 1884.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Georges Boulanger, commander of the occupation division, to Paul Cambon, Resident general, 27 August 1884.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, the civil controller of Bizerte to Justin Massicault, Resident general, 1 August 1887.

⁶⁷ In January 1895, Jean-Claude Barban's widow sent a supplication to the Resident general in which she claimed an indemnity of 1,320 Francs, equivalent to the rents paid by her late husband under the “enzel” contract: NAT, FPC-E-0587-3, Georges Guérin, owner, to René Millet, Resident general, 25 January 1896.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, the public prosecutor of Tunis to Justin Massicault, Resident general, 16 April 1888.

⁶⁹ G. A. Ballard, ‘La protection du commerce anglais en temps de guerre’, *Revue maritime*, 140 (1899), 131. In October 1902, the Directorate General for Public Works spoke at length about how the island would constitute, in the event of ‘maritime warfare [...] a first-class fulcrum’: NAT, FPC-E-0587-3, Eugène de Fages, Director General of Public Works, to Stephen Pichon, Resident general, 21 October 1902.

⁷⁰ P. Vernier, ‘Genèse et développement de la base navale de Bizerte : “un Toulon africain ?”’, in André Leroy and Christiane Villain-Gandossi (eds.), *Les navigations organisées et les stations navales en Méditerranée* (Ollioules, 2004).

legitimizing, at least symbolically, the irregular occupation of the island by the fishermen.⁷¹

The fishermen created an autonomous community, reflecting Antonio Darco's convictions, refusing any form of cohabitation, whether with the Beylical delegates, private traders or the nascent French administration, and thus lived self-sufficiently on the island as if they lived in an era innocent of colonial encroachments. However, with the Decree of 1 July 1885 that regulated the registration of private property and that of 26 September 1887 that fixed the demarcation of the public domain, the General Residence had legal tools that could be implemented in the protectorate. Subsequently, the Galite Islands remained on the fringe of the first wave of leaseholds in the Tunisian maritime public domain, which resulted in the concession of coastline areas along the lagoons rich with fish of Tunis, Porto-Farina, Bizerte and the Bibans and consequently led to profound changes within the ecosystems and the Tunisian and European fishing communities.⁷²

Nationality and local customs

The historiography of the Maghreb's Ottoman provinces, and Tunisia in particular, has contributed greatly to the rethinking of the multiple and shifting scales of belonging into which individuals fit.⁷³ Christian Windler spoke of "masters of concealment and adaptation" concerning the "local customs of nationality".⁷⁴ Whether it was the vessels' nationality - it was common to find French, Tunisian and Italian flags in the holds of Italian barges operating on the Algerian-Tunisian maritime border, depending on which territorial waters they were fishing or trading in. Concerning the crews' nationalities, many fishermen paid for patents and passports to fish and be exonerated from paying taxes. Although French colonization in the Maghreb and the process of Tunisian nationalization did not shatter the many layers of belonging to which those in the fishing sector had been connected for several centuries, it did contribute to their reconfiguring their strategies by reconsidering the rights of access to the territories and the fishing resources.

Let us imagine that one Saturday morning in August 1903, the inhabitants of the Galite Islands see, at the peak of the lobster fishing season, a procession of French officials and soldiers disembarking from the aviso of Bizerte for the first time. After having exchanged a few words with the heads of the families in their language, the delegate of the General Residence, Albert d'Anthouard, fires 21 cannon shots and plants a tricolour flag. The symbolism is strong and the protocol is respected. A few months earlier, Émile Loubet's tour of Algeria and Tunisia had enabled each representative of the colonial state to rehearse

⁷¹ NAT, FPC-E-0587-3, the Civil Controller of Bizerte to Justin Massicault, Resident general, 1 August 1887.

⁷² D. Faget, W. Boughedir and J. Ben Souissi, 'Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire des pêches en Tunisie. Les pêcheries de Bizerte face aux mutations coloniales (1880-1920)', in Daniel Faget and Myriam Sternberg (eds.), *Pêches méditerranéennes. Origines et mutations. Protohistoire-XXI^e siècle* (Aix-en-Provence/Paris, 2015).

⁷³ Julia Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an age of migration, c.1800-1900* (Berkeley, 2011); Anne-Marie Planel, *Du comptoir à la colonie. Histoire de la communauté française de Tunisie – 1814-1883* (Paris, 2015).

⁷⁴ Christian Windler, *La diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre. Consuls français au Maghreb (1700-1840)* (Genève, 2002), 143.

for this republican staging.⁷⁵ Although the ceremony was a small, local event, it was widely reported by the regional and metropolitan press, from Tunis to Troyes.⁷⁶ The short accounts dwelt on the mythical figure of the “tyrant king”, Antonio Darco, and described the Galician fishermen as a true “colony of Robinsons”.

By piecing together the dispersed archives of the French protectorate’s administration for Tunisia, one can observe the chronology of the exchanges that led to the republican ceremony of 8 August 1903 and weigh up all the conflicting forces that brought it about. At the end of 1902, after the failure of the private colonization project and an umpteenth conflict between the fishermen and a representative of the civil administration,⁷⁷ Resident-General Stephen Pichon affirmed that “the moment seems to have come to apply measures to the Galite Islands, if not the totality of those that govern Tunisia, at least those judged to be indispensable to clarify rights of sovereignty and administrative control”.⁷⁸ The inhabitants of the Galite Islands lived:

[...] without law and in a state of complete anarchy. They are not subject to any authority; they have no priest to assist them; they do not pay for patents or taxes. They fish with nets that suit them, without any regulation; their boats are not registered; ultimately, they abide neither by the Italian government’s nor the government of the protectorate’s rules.⁷⁹

What was at stake for the colonial authority was the integration of a small fishing society that had remained on the periphery during the economic and administrative movement of assimilating Europeans in Tunisia, which had been ongoing since the mid-1890s. The programme, written by Pichon, consisted of various points, including the obligation of foreign heads of households to declare their residence under the Decree of 13 April 1898.⁸⁰ In addition, a health officer was assigned to the area, combining the functions of coast guard, police officer and civil registrar.⁸¹ Thus, in short, a small municipality, albeit without a mayor, was established.

Moreover, the 1903 meeting was to be the occasion to integrate into the national circle the Italian fishermen who had settled in the French territories of the Maghreb several decades previously.⁸² The population, which barely exceeded 30 individuals at the end of the 1880s, increased considerably during the 1890s, reaching nearly 130 inhabitants in the early

⁷⁵ O. Ihl, ‘Sous le regard de l’indigène. Le voyage du président Loubet en Algérie’, in Jean-William Dereymez, Olivier Ihl and Gérard Sabatier (eds.), *Un cérémonial politique. Les voyages officiels des chefs d’État* (Paris, 1998).

⁷⁶ Of the numerous articles found, all repeat the information from the *Dépêche tunisienne* (10 August 1903).

⁷⁷ In April 1899, when the Directorate General of Public Works was extracting stone, a conflict arose between a labourer and several inhabitants of the island, forcing the general residence to have the engineers accompanied by a gendarmerie brigade: NAT, FPC-E-0587-3, the secretary of the general residence to Captain Deneuve, April 1899.

⁷⁸ NAT, FPC-E-0587-3, Stephen Pichon, Resident general, to M. Roy, Secretary General of the Government, 20 November 1902.

⁷⁹ NCDA, Fond Granchamp, 1TUV/126/50, Eugène de Fages, Director General of Public Works, to Stephen Pichon, Resident general, 21 October 1902.

⁸⁰ NAT, FPC-E-0587-3, Stephen Pichon, Resident general, to M. Roy, Secretary General of the Government, 20 November 1902.

⁸¹ *Journal officiel du gouvernement tunisien*, 10 January 1903, decree of 3 January 1903, and *Ibid.*, 25 April 1903, decree of 21 April 1903.

⁸² NAT, FPC-E-0587-3, rapport du commandant du Phlégéton, 17 juillet 1903 ; rapport du commandant de l’avis-torpilleur la Flèche, 21 July 1903.

1900s.⁸³ The island was a small nucleus of Europeans, most of whom were Italian.⁸⁴ At that time the discourse on the “Italian peril” in Tunisia mobilized the supporters of colonization, as the Italian population in Tunisia approached 60,000 individuals, compared to about 16,000 French.⁸⁵ The supporters were concerned that France had not succeeded, regarding the conventions of 1896, in negotiating the expansion of the liberal naturalization regime with Italy that was applied in Algeria.⁸⁶ Even though this allowed Italians born in Tunisia to retain their nationality, from 1887 men could apply to the civil controller for French naturalization.⁸⁷ However, few of them took advantage of this, including the fishermen who did not need it.⁸⁸

Ratifying nationality and fishing rights that would lead to the naturalization of the Italian fishermen was the General Residence’s affirmed strategy during the official visit of 1903. Supported by many key figures including Gaston Loth, historian and professor at the Lycée de Tunis, and the very influential geographer Augustin Bernard,⁸⁹ this new inclination towards a Tunisian fisheries policy was not, however, without risk. In neighbouring Algeria, the nationalization of the fisheries sector from the 1860s onwards had led to significant shifts in identities, giving rise to the emergence of complex strategies to circumvent fishing regulations, and contributed to the economic and political crisis at the end of the century.⁹⁰ Many of the fishermen from the Galite Islands had gone to Algeria to apply for naturalization to continue their activity, which was the case of the founding father Antonio Darco, whose file can be found in the National Archives.⁹¹ Although he was already living on the Galite Islands he had obtained naturalization from the Algerian municipality of La Calle. This enabled him to continue fishing as a French fisherman on the coralline reefs of Algeria, thus bypassing the protectionist fishing regulations applied in the neighbouring Algerian waters while using the privileges that his Italian affiliation in Tunisia offered him. In 1903, the Italian Consul General in Tunis, for whom the attitude of French officials on the Galite Islands would come to mark a turning point in the French

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Stephen Pichon, Resident general, to M. Roy, Secretary General of the Government, 20 November 1902.

⁸⁴ A census in March 1903 recorded 131 inhabitants, including 47 naturalized French people and 84 Italians, all fishermen: NAT, FPC-E-0587-3, the Secretary General of the Government to Stephen Pichon, Resident general, 29 March 1903.

⁸⁵ M. I. Choate, ‘Identity politics and political perception in the European settlement of Tunisia: the French colony versus the Italian colony’, *French Colonial History*, 8 (2007).

⁸⁶ Since the senatus-consultum of 14 July 1865, foreigners residing in Algeria could apply for naturalization due a more simplified procedure than in metropolitan France. The law of 26 June 1889 establishing the double right to land had also been extended to the three Algerian departments: Vermeren, *Les Italiens à Bône*, 143 ff.

⁸⁷ Eugène Audinet, *La nationalité française en Algérie et en Tunisie d’après la législation récente* (Alger, 1890), 19.

⁸⁸ Geneviève Goussaud-Falgas, *Les Français de Tunisie de 1881 à 1931* (Paris, 2013).

⁸⁹ CCDA, Political and Commercial Correspondence, new series, Tunisia, Maritime Affairs, 278, report by Gaston Loth “Les pêcheurs et la colonisation maritime en Algérie et en Tunisie (1903)” et *Le peuplement italien en Algérie et en Tunisie* (Paris, 1905), 260 ; A. Bernard, ‘Les conditions de l’établissement des pêcheurs français en Algérie-Tunisie’, *Renseignements coloniaux et documents*, 9 (1903).

⁹⁰ H. Vermeren, ‘Des ”hermaphrodites de la nationalité” ? Colonisation maritime en Algérie et naturalisation des marins-pêcheurs italiens de Bône (Annaba) des années 1860 à 1914’, *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 137 (2015).

⁹¹ AN, BB/2131/1, Antonio Darco’s naturalization file.

naturalization policy in Tunisia, was unaware that Antonio Darco had become French and remained convinced that he had “no desire to renounce his nationality”.⁹²

Fig3 :‘The king Darco’. Antonio Darco is here dressed in the typical coral fisherman outfit : red beret, woolen top with Tunisian collar and linen pants.⁹³

In exchange for their naturalization, the Galicians were offered the “Republican Pact” that contained both protection from seasonal competition from outside the country and, over time, ownership of the lobster beds surrounding the archipelago. One can imagine that the fishermen were well aware of the benefits associated with such a commitment. They knew that the right to fish was negotiated through service in the Navy, even though it was eased in the territories of the empire. Since the Ancien Régime, this right, if granted to fishermen by the sovereign state, constituted “the *quid pro quo* of giving themselves”, in other words, their integration into the Inscription Maritime and, thus, into the class system.⁹⁴ From the point of view of international law, they also knew that obtaining exclusive fishing rights was not an option. The law of 1 March 1888 that prohibited foreigners from fishing in Algerian waters, and which marked the high point in the nationalization of the local fishing sector, could not be extended to the protectorate for it was incompatible with the clauses on fishing in the Trade and Navigation Convention of 28 September 1896 that guaranteed Italian fishermen free rein for their activity in Tunisian waters. However, the fishermen knew that they now had a negotiating tool to defend their fishing territory.

Over time, the negotiation of exclusive fishing rights would function as a tether to the commitment of naturalization procedures and as a vector of cohesion between the inhabitants of the island. On each occasion when they needed to defend their fishing territory, the Galicians sprang into action; they boarded and searched the foreign ships that were in their waters, multiplied their provocations against the colonial power by requesting arbitration from the Italian consular authority, thus exasperating the Tunisian administration with their “minor appeals”,⁹⁵ and even created an assembly of fishermen, which was unprecedented in itself, and made their demands heard through a *comité d’initiative* (special action committee).

Following the same pattern of conflicts, competition over fisheries resources intensified between the two World Wars and led the protectorate’s administration to increase the number of supervisory and monitoring measures of lobster fishing. The seasonal nature of fishing rights was manipulated like an adjustable valve to limit the exploitation of the lobster resources and to protect local fishermen. Like the Kerkennah Islands, where, as early as 1875, France and Greece had agreed upon extending the limits of territorial waters to ten nautical miles as well as granting the local populations exclusive fishing rights,⁹⁶ the Galician territorial waters included the lobster beds beyond the traditional three nautical miles,⁹⁷ thus extending the Tunisian fisheries jurisdiction over resources located in

⁹² Archivio storico diplomatico del ministero degli Affari Esteri, Affari Politici, 1891-1910 Algeria, b. 394, Tomasso Carletti, Consul General of Italy in Tunis, to Enrico Morin, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, 29 August 1903.

⁹³ Photo taken from Maurice de Galbert (lieutenant de vaisseau), *L’île de la Galite, notes de voyage*, Grenoble, Allier Frères, 1904.

⁹⁴ Romain Grancher, ‘À qui appartiennent les poissons...’, 109.

⁹⁵ NCDA, Fond Grandchamp, ITU/126/50, M. Buovolo, chief engineer delegated by the General Directorate of Public Works to François Manceron, Resident general, 17 August 1929.

⁹⁶ Jules Cotte *et al.*, *L’industrie des pêches aux colonies* (Marseille, 1906), 11.

⁹⁷ NAT, FPC-E-395-1-8, Order of Vice-Admiral Rivet, Maritime Prefect of Tunisia, 22 November 1939.

international waters. Other measures to support the Galician fishermen were adopted during the 1930s. An initial residential decree required that the well-boats justify the origin of the shellfish by providing a customs certificate, in case of a control, issued at the time of purchase in Tunisian ports.⁹⁸ To preserve the sea beds and control the trawling activities, several texts were issued by the Department of Public Works to limit the number of fishing permits for bottom trawls affirming, from 1937, the "priority [...] to ship owners who usually reside in Tunisia", thus introducing a "national" preference.⁹⁹ The question of the Galician's monopoly over the lobster stocks in the Galician archipelago was once again examined in the summer of 1938 by the Public Works Directorate but in vain.

Conclusion

The history of the Italian settlement on the Galite Island is not only, as Pierre Soumille put it, a "marginal phenomenon of colonization";¹⁰⁰ it is also a symbolic manifestation of French imperialism in North Africa and characterizes in many ways the slow, uneven development of the French administration of the protectorate. Colonialism is not only an organised system based on domination, coercion and exclusion. It is also uncertainty and dysfunction which produce different degrees of sovereignty and gradations of rights. As explained by Ann Laura Stoler, "critical features of imperial formations include harboring and building on territorial ambiguity, redefining legal categories of belonging".¹⁰¹ As we have seen, the fishing communities play on the territorial ambiguities of the Galite Island. The affirmation of French territorial control over Tunisia was not a linear process. It did not eliminate the Franco-Italian rivalries and conflicts over the exploitation of the island's waters and their resources. But it integrated the Italian fishermen into Tunisian colonial society through the right to fish and into the French nation through naturalization. In 1931, nearly 80% of the inhabitants on the Galite Islands were French.¹⁰²

How would things have been if the fishermen of the Galite Island had been Arabs or Berbers? On other islands such as Kerkennah, where there were very old indigenous fisheries, the structures of ownership of the waters were undermined during the protectorate.¹⁰³ But the colonial power never contested the fishing rights of the indigenous populations, nor their presence on these islands. Certainly, the installation of these Italian fishermen's families on an isolated island presented a rather new situation in the history of colonial Tunisia. Their Ponzese origin, while 75% of the Italians in Tunisia were Sicilians¹⁰⁴ and their repeated insubordination when faced by attempts to place them under Beylical and then French tutelage explain the fascination that the Galite Islands' inhabitants upheld for the press and in travelogues throughout their existence.

The case study of the Galite Islands also demonstrates the predominant role of the fisheries sector in the process of European settlement in the Maghreb. The reconstruction of the

⁹⁸ *Journal officiel du gouvernement tunisien*, 21 December 1934, Decree of 14 December 1934.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16 March 1937, 23 February 1937.

¹⁰⁰ Soumille, 'Minorités et vie maritime', 191.

¹⁰¹ A. L. Stoler, 'On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty', *Public Culture*, 18 (2006-1), 128.

¹⁰² Welcoming the fact that "all but a few had become French", Lucien Saint's successor, François Manceron, praised the perseverance of the civil controller of Bizerte: NCD, Fond Granchamp, 1TUV/126/50, letter from François Manceron, Resident general, to Victor Mottes, Civil Controller of Bizerte, 7 November 1930.

¹⁰³ Faget, 'La mer disputée'.

¹⁰⁴ R. H. Rainero, 'La présence italienne en Tunisie de 1868 à 1896 d'après les bulletins diplomatiques et consulaires', in *Les relations tuniso-italiennes dans le contexte du protectorat* (Tunis, 1999), 26.

pioneering families' migratory routes show the extent to which the changes in fishing for red coral in the Mediterranean played a leading role in Italian fishing communities moving to the western Tunisian coast, placing the latter in the same space of intercoastal fishing activities as the eastern part of the Algerian *Tell*. The displacement of coral fishing activity towards the ports of Bône and La Calle from the 1850s led to the settling of the Ponzesi coral fishermen and marked the end of their itinerant seasonal migrations between the Peninsula and the North African coast. Its decline subsequently pushed some of them to reconvert to lobster fishing, for which they already had a pluriactive network coupled with their coral harvesting, which linked the Gulf of Naples to the south of Sardinia and the Maghreb coasts. The fishermen found on the Galite Islands, an area they had been going to for many years, a maritime territory rich in shellfish, still wild and untouched by any authority. Their occupation of this territory may be interpreted both as a desire to escape from a coral fishery that was in full decline at the end of the nineteenth century but also in terms of a reluctance to seek exemption from all forms of authority, whether professional or state.

Finally, fishermen of la Galite were like the nomadic peoples described by the American historian Charles S. Maier. They claimed shares of global space and territorial stability without fixed frontiers.¹⁰⁵ And this is how they participated, here as elsewhere, in structuring the administration of the islands and waters, and the deployment of the colonial state.

¹⁰⁵ Maier, *Once within Borders*, 6.